

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1        1. A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the  
2 steps of:

3                obtaining chilled, par-fried potato pieces; and  
4                surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus  
5 having an exit into a clean room environment.

1        2. A method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the surface  
2 pasteurizing step comprises surface pasteurizing in a pasteurization apparatus  
3 selected from the group consisting of an impingement oven, a steam tunnel, an  
4 ultra violet light tunnel, and radurization equipment.

1        3. A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:  
2                chilling the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step  
3 of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus.

1        4. A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:  
2                aseptically packaging the potato pieces in a clean room environment  
3 after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization  
4 apparatus.

1        5. A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:

2                packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean  
3                room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a  
4                pasteurization apparatus.

1                6.        A method in accordance with Claim 5, wherein the potato pieces  
2                packaged in a clean room environment have a shelf life of at least 60 days at  
3                refrigerated temperatures.

1                7.        A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the  
2                steps of:  
3                obtaining chilled, par-fried potato pieces; and  
4                surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus  
5                having an exit into a clean room environment, the surface pasteurizing providing  
6                at least one final microbial count selected from the group consisting of:

7                less than 1.0-3.0 log CFU/g aerobic plate count;

8                less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g coliforms;

9                less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Escherichia coli*;

10               less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Staphylococcus aureus*;

11               less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g molds; and

12               less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g yeasts;

- 13 wherein the potato pieces are negative for *Listeria monocytogenes*,  
14 *Salmonella*, *Clostridium botulinum*, *Escherichia coli O157:H7*, and  
15 *Staphylococcus aureus*.